

## **The Life of the Christian**

### **2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

What is the life of the Christian like? It is like your life! Yes, that is the life of the Christian.

You may have heard some ideas about what the Christian life is supposed to be like. In fact, there are many out there who will tell you exactly what the life of the Christian looks like.

“If you are a Christian, then these are the things that you will do. If you are not doing them, then you are not truly a Christian. And, this is a list of things you will not do as a Christian, if you are doing them, then you are not a Christian.”

They may add this to their teaching, “If you pray this prayer x-number of times each day, then whatever you pray for will be given to you.”

Or maybe they say, “If you have strong enough faith, then you will have not problems.”

I remember when some friends of the family brought a faith healer to our home to heal my mother of her multiple sclerosis – so she could move anywhere on her own and see again. I came home from college to be there that day. This faith healer laid hands on my mom, prayed, and told her to get up and walk. When my mom could not, the process was repeated – a little longer and a little louder – and mom was told to get up and walk, “If you really believe, you will get up and walk.” Yep, nothing happened again!

Now you could tell this faith healer was getting serious! With a furrowed brow, she huddled her disciples that came along, and when they came out of the huddle it was all business. More prayers, laying on of hands, a bit of shaking mom in her bed, but I do not remember any reading of Scripture. Finally, with a final shove of my mother’s head into the bed, she was instructed to get up and walk.

When she did not, the faith healer proclaimed, “This is not my fault. It is obvious you do not have faith, that you do not believe. If you did, you would get up and walk. God cannot work on you if you do not believe.”

This faith healer was saying that if life is not what we “want” it to be like, it is because our faith is not strong enough? That is horrendous false teaching. It has

terrifying consequences in the lives of those who believe what this wolf in sheep's clothing, this anti-christ, this destroyer of souls who followed her, was saying.

Dearly beloved of God, I do not want trials or struggles or problems in life. I hate confrontations. I do not enjoy pain. I would rather that life goes smoothly, that there would be no temptations that challenge my faith. But that is not how things go. In fact, we should expect things to go just the opposite.

If there are troubles in your life, does it mean that God is displeased with you? If you are struggling with something, does that mean that God has abandoned you?

If you listen to many who claim to teach in the name of Christ, they would say, "Yes!" They are charlatans and frauds, false teachers, they should and will be eternally accursed. Such a teaching brings people to despair and depression when things in the life take a turn into the toilet, and sooner or later bad stuff comes into our lives – sinfulness in the world guarantees that it will happen.

Paul was a man of faith, one whom Christ had chosen as His messenger of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Let him be an example to us. What did he say in this letter to the church at Corinth, which God inspired him to write for our instruction in this matter? *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* (2 Cor. 12:7-9)

Did you hear it. Because of his faith, because he was God's servant, Satan was tormenting him. And, when he asked God for relief, to remove this "thorn" from him, God did not do as requested – He basically said, "No," although a bit more eloquently. God's grace was sufficient, Paul's weakness made Paul rely upon God, pray to God, trust in God.

In our Gospel lesson, we see that there are things that assail us in our life. Satan attacks us, he tries to steal the Word from our hearts. Testings, trials, tribulations also assail us, and many fall from faith. The world is also a temptress, the cares, the riches, the pleasures of life are a seductress leading us away from God.

The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh would lead us away from God. These tempt us to abandon our faith and trust in God.

But Paul had still more problems in his life, challenging his faith. Did you hear what his life was like in our text? Paul recounts some of the things he's endured, boasting of them. *“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”*

Wow! I have not endured anything like that for being a minister of the Gospel? Sure, I know of those who despise me because I will not compromise the Word of God, but they haven't stoned me yet. There are those who might like me either to shut up or leave town, but they have not whipped me or beaten me with rods.

What have you endured because you are a Christian? Have you been ridiculed for saying that life is a gift of God, and it is He who begins it in the womb? Have you been called names because you stated that people can live their own lives however they want, but there may be eternal consequences for some of those choices – choices that are directly in opposition to God's Word.

The life of the Christian is lived in the world, but we are not to be of the world. That is not easy!

Everything I have is God's gift to me; my wife, my children, the roof over my head, the food on my table, even my very life are all God's gift to me. Every bit of talent and ability I have are God's gifts to me. Every possession and all my financial resources are God's gifts to me. Even the faith that I profess before you, is nothing more than God's gracious gift to me of faith.

There are days that I look at my life and honesty sets in. Truly, what do I deserve from God? I have not been obedient to my heavenly Father. My sinfulness is only too plainly evident. Too many days I did not begin – nor end – with meditation upon His word and prayer to Him. My behaviors and words to the wife He gave me were definitely not pleasing to Him. There were thoughts this week about the task He has given me as pastor, how I wanted to chuck in the towel so I no longer have to deal with the rumors, innuendos, and hatred that comes to my ears from

those sheep He has called me to serve, and in turn anger has arisen in my heart toward those whom I am to love as His dear children.

What do I deserve from the hand of God? Wrath and eternal punishment. Oh how Satan loves to use that line on me... and on you. How he loves to get into our head and say, "That is why things are not good, why your life is not great, you have pissed off God and now He is taking it out on you."

Dear friends, that is the daily struggle, that is the life of the Christian. We struggle and wrestle each day with temptation, with sin, with guilt. But you do not struggle alone. In your trials, in your tribulations, in your temptations and sorrow, that is, in your times of weakness, then the power of Christ rests upon you.

It may look bleak, it may feel helpless, but then is when we need to hear again God's promise, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

But God, it does not feel that way?

"I gave to you my only begotten Son. He endured the same trials and temptations you did. You want to know my thoughts about you, look to my Christ and what he endured on the cross. That was for you. He suffered for you. And if that event is too far removed from your life, if you have a hard time envisioning that. Then remember this. I called you by name, I washed you clean in the water of baptism, I declared you mine and promise never to abandon you. Hear the word of forgiveness I speak into your ear by the mouth of my minister. Eat of the very flesh that I joyfully allowed to be pierced for your sake. Drink of my blood, which I shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. These are the means by which I build you up in me. These are the instruments by which I strengthen your faith." "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

"But God, it was just water, nothing special. Our pastor who speaks to us is a sinner just like us. To be honest that little wafer of bread seems stale, and that small sip of wine barely moistens my mouth."

And God says, "Do not look with your fleshly eyes, but look with the eyes of faith. Know this, in these gifts, *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

It is these means by which Christ binds you to Himself. Your suffering is where He bore your sins, your trials and tribulations. He bore them to remove them from you, to take away the cause of your suffering, and the cause of all human suffering –

sinfulness. His suffering, death, and resurrection is good for it is our forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. That is our eternal hope, even in this midst of this life which we know as all too fragile.

So, when you are weak, remember His promise, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

Then run to Him, run to where He has promised to grant you His power, the place the He gives His strength in your weakness, that is, forgiveness in sinfulness. His power is in your baptism, it is in your ear as you hear the Gospel, it is in your mouth as you eat the flesh of your crucified God and drink of the blood He shed for you.

Listen to Him and know from His gracious Word to you, that only when you are weak are you truly strong. Amen.